

Town and Country

I appreciate the efforts of the Secretary and the Board of Food and Agriculture to develop a shared vision for agriculture in California.

Although you've asked all of us to answer four questions, I'd like to focus my comments on a subject that is intertwined with each of your questions, and that is the notion of sustainability.

We can project a future for California agriculture that revolves around the concept of sustainability, but we cannot do that without ensuring that accepted or even demanded definitions of sustainability do not exacerbate the ongoing loss of crops and farmland in California.

California agriculture has been a remarkable success story. Our farm gate value contribution to the state's economy is now about \$34 billion. Historically, our economic contribution to California has always gone up, even though the amount of farm land has steadily declined. It is a testament to the innovation and energy of California farmers that they have been able to increase yields and crop values to keep pace with higher costs of operation and in spite of reduced acreage upon which to do it.

The obvious question that any Ag Vision must confront is this: Is the recent past a vision of a sustainable future? Can we continue to expect a rising economic contribution from agriculture even as we witness the rapid loss of farm land and the movement of California agricultural production to other states and nations?

I would suggest the answer is no.

Agriculture by its very success stands as the chief protector of our open space and conservator of natural resources. A farmer who cannot or will not protect his land from environmental degradation will soon be out of business. That is not the story of California's farmers. Yet, too many in our society fail to see the truth of that statement. Thus some call for sustainability in food production with the explicit expectation that such a standard will mandate specific environmental

and even labor practices that may be in serious conflict with the first mandate of sustainability in any business endeavor: *profitability*.

A vision for California agriculture in 2030 must clearly ascertain the reasons for lost agricultural production over time. Do public policies in the state specifically and unambiguously enhance, advance, or promote the agricultural sector? Stated differently, is agriculture genuinely accepted as a major pillar of California's economy, now and in the future, in principle, practice, and policy? Will essential natural resources be available in the future to the agricultural economy, especially water supplies and comprehensive land use policies that promote alternatives to development? Agriculture is an essential component of the California landscape (it is "edible landscape" to use the Secretary's phrase) and provides ecosystem value to the citizens of the state (open space, view sheds, and the like). Is the tension between conservation, preservation and development at the ag-urban interface, where the town touches the country, addressed in such a way that farmers have choices or alternatives to development? These are the critical issues, to my mind, that challenge the vision of California agriculture in 2030, because without these components the industry cannot function, and will not be profitable. In short, if the resources are not available, and the regulatory apparatus is not supportive, this industry will not be what it is today.

When comparing these challenges to the requirements of the human body for life, it's interesting to note that living things will die in a matter of minutes without air, but may survive for days without food or water. What is agriculture's equivalent of life-critical air? That should be the primary focus of a sustainable future. Air itself, but certainly water and available farm labor should be very high on anyone's short list of essentials.

Sustainability, as I said before, must include profitability. In the context of the "triple bottom line" of social, environmental, and economic benefit (or "people, planet, and profit" as it is often described), it takes the profit piece to make the others work. If agriculture works for the farmer, financially, it will work for the farm worker and the communities in which they live. "Win-win-win" for people, planet, and profit.

It is interesting to note that in the last census some 94% of California's residents lived in cities and towns (so-called "urban" areas). While city dwellers have always been great in numbers, the proportion of the population in cities, as opposed to country or rural areas, continues to grow. (This year it is calculated that more than half the population of the earth will be living in urban areas for the first time in history.) What this tells us is that the countryside -- where fewer and fewer people live -- clearly functions to feed and clothe the hungry cities where the vast majority of the population lives. The implications for transportation corridors and other rural infrastructure are obvious. The "country" today is more important to the future of California (and the planet) perhaps than at any other time in our history.

All of this is simply to say that the Ag Vision you ultimately produce must confront the hard resource allocation and public policy issues that threaten the sustainability of California agriculture today and in the next twenty years. Everything is not all right in all sectors of our diverse industry. Every year, this state makes it a bit harder to reasonably expect a profit from farming. This has been the trend for decades, but we may be reaching the tipping point very soon. If we do, there is little to be gained by projecting a vision for California agriculture in 20 years because we will have failed to sustain it while we could.

I ask you to use this process to pinpoint the challenges that the State of California uniquely presents to sustainability in farming and propose solutions. The list to be addressed is long: supportive public policy with respect to water supplies, regulatory compliance issues, crop protection materials, labor availability and costs, energy costs, transportation infrastructure, research and development objectives, promotion and market access, and much, much more. These complex and politically charged issues cannot be allowed to languish unless we are willing to see a continuing loss of crops and farmland in our state and with it, the loss of the opportunity to craft a sustainable future.

Thank you for this time to testify before you.